



Parent Information Network

Arizona Department of Education
Exceptional Student Services



Tips for Developing Effective Disability Awareness Programs

Developing an effective disability awareness program is the first step in promoting positive and accurate perceptions of people who have disabilities. Disability awareness can be accomplished in many ways: by using a formal curriculum targeting a specific disability, or a variety of special needs; viewing TV programs and commercials that feature individuals with disabilities; reading current literature; and forming diverse friendships. Whatever the focus, a successful program promotes understanding of the needs and abilities of people challenged by a disability and strives to break down barriers.

Most schools have students with special needs. Consider the student's needs and interests to determine how the program can change attitudes.

- β **Do students make friends with each other?**
- β **Are there physical barriers that need to be removed?**
- β **Do students know how to communicate with their peers who have special needs?**
- β **Do students realize that all people are more alike than different?**
- β **Have students learned to respect the unique abilities of each individual?**

The answers to these questions will help determine the focus of a disability awareness program. Then carefully research available programs and resources to find a suitable program, or combination of programs.

A comprehensive disability awareness program may encompass all, or many of these developmental, emotional or physical conditions that qualify a student for special education services:

Autism	Emotional Disability	Hearing Impairment
Mental Retardation	Multiple Disabilities	Orthopedic Impairment
Other Health Impairments	Preschool Delays	Traumatic Brain Injury
Specific Learning Disability	Speech/Language Impairment	Visual Impairment

Just how descriptive the explanation of these disabilities needs to be will depend upon the interest and age level of the participants. A good program will provide enough information to change stereotypes and promote relationships among all students.

An effective way to teach awareness about individuals with special needs is to use a variety of teaching tools, such as: videos; guest speakers; stories; simulation activities of a specific disability; demonstrations of assistive devices and adaptations; and question and answer sessions. To enhance sensitivity, the presentation should include areas in which people with disabilities often experience difficulty, such as: self-care; communication; mobility; learning; social skills; and independent living skills. Attention should focus in a positive manner on how individuals with disabilities have unique abilities and adapt to everyday situations.

Consider naming the program an “abilities awareness program” since the word disability draws attention to those characteristics that make people different, or unequal. There are, in fact, more similarities than differences. People with developmental or physical disabilities have needs and strengths, just like every other person. Celebrate the abilities of individuals with special needs!

After a presentation, regularly plan activities that include both children with and without disabilities. Model for students ways they can use their new skills of understanding and acceptance. Praise their sensitivity. Encourage friendships among all children. Maintaining the positive impact of a successful program is an accomplishment to be very proud of!

Developing a Disability Awareness Program

I. Select a Disability Awareness Program (DAP)

- A. Schedule a meeting with the Special Education Director or school administrator.
 - 1. During the meeting discuss:
 - a. the purpose of having a DAP;
 - b. the expected outcomes;
 - c. the target audience;
 - d. who will facilitate the DAP;
 - e. agree on an action plan; and

- f. clarify roles for the administrator and any other people interested in the project.
 2. Take notes during the meeting. At a later time furnish the administrator with a copy asking for corrections, deletions or additions.
 3. Contact the Parent Information Network Specialist from the Arizona Department of Education, Exceptional Student Services for technical assistance if needed.
- B. Choose a program
 6. Locate samples of DAPs, view demonstrations, or ask for materials on loan before making a decision on what program to use.
 5. Investigate and choose a DAP that would be appropriate to meet the needs of the district or school. Consider:
 - a. ideas from previous meetings (purpose, audience, facilitators);
 - b. the most effective time for a presentation (a certain month, week or day);
 - c. the location for the DAP; and
 - d. funding sources for necessary materials.
 4. Explore the possibility of a joint program with other schools, school districts, or community organizations to share program materials, speakers, expertise, or volunteers.
 3. Find out how other groups have structured their programs. Ask if they rely on volunteers or if they use staff.
 2. Determine if existing programs are adequate, or if a unique program needs to be developed to suit the target audience.
 1. Make contacts for any funding needed:
 - a. school district/department budgets, parent/teacher organizations, grants, etc.;
 - b. educational/professional organizations;
 - c. disability/advocacy organizations;
 - d. corporate/business donations;
 - e. civic donations: Disability Awareness Committee, grants, and libraries; or
 - f. private donations (tax deductible, if possible).

II. Present the Disability Awareness Program

- A. Decide who will present the program and how many people will be needed.
 1. Recruit volunteers:

- a. parents (PTA/PTO or other parent groups in the community);
 - b. school staff (teachers, aides, administrators, or ancillary support staff);
 - c. students (special education, drama classes, clubs, colleges);
 - d. professional associations (sororities, fraternities, educators, health care providers, etc.);
 - e. disability related advocacy organizations (The Arc, Civitan, Jr. Civitan, disability specific support groups, etc.);
 - f. civic organizations (Kiwanis, Jr. League, Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP), drama/theater groups); or
 - g. friends and relatives.
 - 2. Volunteer recognition:
 - a. use thank you notes, awards, internal newsletter articles, and media coverage to show appreciation for the volunteers and staff; and
 - b. plan an end of the year event to celebrate the program's efforts and honor the volunteers (a potluck meal with a videotape of presentations, thank you posters with volunteer photos posted throughout the school, etc.).
- B. Delegate tasks to volunteers:
- 1. Recruitment and training:
 - a. network with other groups that have presented the same, or similar training, and ask for assistance in getting started;
 - b. meet regularly with volunteers to review tasks, provide support needed, retain enthusiasm, and maintain the quality of the program; and
 - c. continue to recruit and train new volunteers to avoid burnout, fill vacancies, and to keep the momentum building.
 - 2. Scheduling:
 - a. set a schedule for practice sessions;
 - b. plan a rehearsal with a "mock" audience for feedback or video tape it;
 - c. arrange presentations to various groups to introduce the program; and
 - d. schedule presentations well in advance to have plenty of time to arrange for volunteers, use of materials, and publicity.
 - 3. Public relations/publicity:
 - a. send school staff information about the program at the beginning of the school year and regularly follow-up;

- b. use a variety of publicity strategies (school newsletters, libraries, posters/fliers, radio announcements, TV announcements, local newspapers, billboards, etc.)
 - c. display photos of presentations and written comments on a bulletin board in the school to promote and add impact to the program (e.g. a non-disabled peer's reflection on what he/she has learned and how it changed their behavior.)
 - d. invite VIPs (school board members, administrators, etc.) to presentations
 - 4. Fund raising:
 - a. don't forget to send thank-you notes
 - b. include mention of sponsors/donations in publicity
 - 5. Maintain materials:
 - a. keep materials in a central location
 - b. repair and restock materials as necessary
 - 6. Program development:
 - a. research materials for program expansion
 - b. evaluate presentations to judge effectiveness
 - 2. Classroom liaison:
 - a. call or send reminder notices about the presentation
 - b. suggest classroom, home and community activities that will enhance the presentation to be used before, or after the program
 - 8. Historian:
 - a. keep a log of presentations.
 - b. preserve copies of publicity and keep a file of responses
- C. Presenting the program:
 - 1. Materials/Equipment:
 - a. make sure the necessary equipment and materials are available
 - b. make sure the equipment is in working order
 - c. have a sufficient amount of handouts and samples for hands-on activities
 - 2. Logistics:
 - a. confirm location, time and expected number of participants
 - b. arrive early to set-up the room
 - c. direct participants to desired seating area

3. Presentation:
 - a. start and end on time
 - b. give an introduction to peak their interest – describe what will be seen and heard
 - c. explain why it is important to tell the audience something specific to look or listen for
 - d. ask the audience to hold their questions until the end and provide an adequate amount of time to do so (offer to get answers to difficult questions and then report findings back to the group)
 - e. present the material as practiced in a clear and concise manner
 - f. video tape the presentation to critique later

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